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The Employment of War Dogs in the Medieval and Early Modern West

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the military use of dogs in the west, principally from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. It is argued that the use of 'war dogs' was a recurrent but essentially ad hoc, sporadic and localized practice, quite distinct from the regular dog handling units that were established in the late nineteenth century. However, from the earliest phases of European colonization in the fifteenth century, another tradition, which employed dogs as weapons and instruments of torture, developed in the context of racialized warfare. The legacy of this infamous practice would be felt again in the twentieth century.

Introduction

The much-publicized presence of military working dogs (MWDs) in recent global conflicts has stimulated interest both in the history of the use of war dogs and a commendable concern for the treatment of such animals after their service. Yet scholarly studies remain comparatively rare and much of the more popular work is problematic. Two recurrent aspects of the established literature are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, they tend to posit a long continuity in the employment of dogs in a military context. Scattered references to 'war dogs' in ancient and medieval sources are accepted uncritically and serve as a prologue for contemporary MWD programmes. Sébastien Polin, for example, begins his study in pre-history, commenting that the dog was 'man's first auxiliary in war' and then 'remained for several millennia by his side during the fighting.'[1] Yet the MWDs on current deployments are very much

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v7i1.1465
[1]Sébastien Polin, *Le chien de guerre utilisations à travers les conflits,* (PhD Thesis: Ecole Nationale Veternaire D' Alfort, 2003), http://theses.vet-alfort.fr/telecharger.php?id=467, Accessed 5 September 2020 p. 3. The fact that many nineteenth century advocates of 'war dogs' tended to cite ancient precedents for rhetorical purposes has perhaps misled subsequent historians. See, for example,

part of a modern tradition dating only from the late nineteenth century: professional, regular military units of dogs and dog handlers, whose personnel, both animal and human, have been carefully selected and rigorously trained for specific military purposes.[2] Secondly, while correctly noting the centrality of the human-canine affective bond to the effectiveness of war dogs, they tend to place an emphasis almost wholly on such appealing qualities as mutuality, courage and loyalty.[3] Yet, as Sara E. Johnson and Robert Tindol have demonstrated, the human exploitation of dogs' obedience, aggressiveness and desire to please their handlers has been characteristic of an altogether darker history: the weaponizing of dogs and their use as instruments of torture.[4] In this, we find a long and disturbing continuity.

The historiography of pre-modern war dogs is even less substantial than that of modern MWDs. David Karunanithy has provided the most comprehensive survey of the sources, literary, material and artistic, all surveyed with a critical eye.[5] Yet Karunanithy's ambitious scope (his approach is global and his chronology stretches from the second millennium BCE to the early 19 Century CE), largely precludes detailed analysis on any specific period or location. More period-specific work is scattered and dated. Classicists, for example, have long depended on two venerable articles by E. S. Forster and G. B. A Fletcher published during the Second World War as a response to reports of the use of MWDs in that conflict.[6] Their intention was

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Nicolas Édouard de La Barre Duparcq's *Les Chiens de Guerre. Étude historique,* (Paris: C. Tanera, 1869), pp. 8-9.

[2]For the establishment of modern military working dog units, see Kimberley Brice O'Donnell, *Doing their Bit: The British Employment of Military and Civil Defence Dogs in the Second World War*, (Warwick: Helion, 2018); Christopher Pearson, "'Four-legged poilus": French Army Dogs, Emotional Practices and the Creation of Militarized Human-Dog Bonds, 1871-1918,' *Journal of Social History*, 52 (2017), pp. 731-760 and Gervase Phillips, 'Technology, "Machine Age" Warfare, and the Military Use of Dogs, 1880–1918,' *Journal of Military History*, 82 (2018), pp. 67-94.

[3]See, for example, Lisa Rogak, *Dogs Of War: The Courage, Love, and Loyalty of Military Working Dogs,* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2011).

[4]Sara E. Johnson, "'You Should Give them Blacks to Eat": Waging Inter-American Wars of Torture and Terror,' *American Quarterly* 61, (2009), pp. 65-92; Robert Tindol, 'The Best Friend of the Murderers: Guard Dogs and the Nazi Holocaust,' in Ryan Hedigger (ed), *Animals and War: Studies of Europe and North America,* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 105-122.

[5]David Karunanithy, *Dogs of War: Canine Use in Warfare from Ancient Egypt to the 19th Century* (London: Yarak Publishing, 2008).

[6]E. S. Forster, 'Dogs in Ancient Warfare', *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 10, No. 30 (1941): pp. 114-117 and G.B.A. Fletcher, 'Another Word on Dogs in Ancient Warfare', *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 11, No. 31 (1941), p. 34.

merely to collect references to the use of war dogs, rather than subject those sources to critical analysis. As the most recent study, by Owen Rees, has demonstrated, the material they gathered, much of it legend, non-contemporaneous hearsay and fanciful invention, cannot be taken at face value. Rees draws the crucial distinction between 'a "dog of war", that is a dog trained for the military environment, and a "dog in war", that is a dog utilised in the military environment without military-specific training.'[7] Rees dispels notions of any specific 'breed' of 'war dog' in the ancient world. Rather dogs that were neither trained nor bred for war were, occasionally, 'caught in the midst' of conflicts. There is no reliable contemporary evidence for dogs being used as combatants. The more reliable sources, such as the fourth-century BCE tactical manual on siege-craft written by the Greek Aeneas Tacticus, confirms the sporadic and extemporised use of dogs as sentries, couriers and with patrols.[8]

This pattern was broadly consistent with the military employment of dogs in the west until the late nineteenth century. However, there is some evidence for localised traditions of using dogs as part of military garrisons, or in the guarding of military or naval supplies. Furthermore, by the sixteenth century, clear evidence exists for the training of aggressive dogs for quasi-military functions, in manner redolent of the training of modern guard dogs. There was also a recurrent practice of deploying such dogs in campaigns of conquest and pacification, against subject peoples whose treatment was considered outside the normal bounds of ethical restraint that operated in warfare. During the colonisation of the western hemisphere, in campaigns waged against both indigenous peoples and rebellious enslaved African Americans, this recurrent practice would become a continuous tradition and thus has a particular, deeply unsettling, significance in the history of war dogs.

Medieval Guard Dogs

Dogs would have been a common sight accompanying medieval armies in the field, but rarely would they have had an explicitly military function. They were, in Rees' terms, 'dogs in war'. The personal retinue of England's King Edward III in his 1359-60

[7]Owen Rees, 'Dogs of War, or Dogs in War? The use of dogs in Classical Greek warfare', *Greece and Rome* Vol.67, No.2 (2020), pp. 230-246. I am grateful to Dr Rees for allowing me to see a copy of this article ahead of publication.

[8]Aeneas Tacticus, *On the Defence of Fortified Positions*, XXII.20, XXXI.31-2. edited by Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1928), pp. 111-112, p. 115, p. 173. The idea that specific 'breeds' were used in antiquity as 'war dogs' is problematic as contemporary notions of dog 'breeds' are modern, see M. Worboys, J.-M. Strange, and N. Pemberton, *The Invention of the Modern Dog: Breed and Blood in Victorian Britain,* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), p. 7. *Cf*, for a more traditional view of 'fighting dog' breeds, Dieter Fleig, *History of Fighting Dogs*, translated by William Charlton, (Neptune City, NJ: T.F.H. Publishing, 1996).

campaign in France included sixty pairs of hunting dogs, for when opportunity arose for sport. His lords maintained similar packs.[9] Where occasional evidence does point to their military deployment, it is in roles familiar from antiquity, especially as guard dogs. The extent of this practice is difficult to gauge. The documentary record is usually sparse; it may be that the use of guard dogs, especially in fortified locations, was so routine that it largely passed without note. Indeed, in one region where the surviving administrative records are particularly rich, there are strong indications that dogs may have been commonly assigned to garrisons. Robert Burns has undertaken an examination of a large sample drawn from two thousand paper charters and documents produced by local notaries in newly-conquered Valencia, during the last twenty years of the reign of King James I of Aragon (*r.*1213 – July 1276). This revealed the frequency and scale of the provision of canine sentinels. The strategically important border castle of Biar is typical. In March 1271, the castellan, Pedro de Segura, received his garrison of '12 men and 1 woman and 1 muleteer and 1 pack animal and 3 dogs.' Burns notes that 'The stipulation of a woman sounds odd in this bellicose context but seems to have been normal in war dog assignments in those parts,' and he suggests that the women of the garrisons may have had a particular responsibility for the animals.[10]

This intriguing documentary record for Valencia is particularly full because James was able to exploit 'the captured paper industry of Islamic Játiva to record his reconstruction of conquered Valencia into a multi-ethnic Christian kingdom,' thus bequeathing historians an especially rich source.[11] Yet, without similar evidence from other regions, it is difficult to establish if the use of guard dogs by Valencian garrisons is typical of the period or not. Other scattered evidence that has been cited by modern historians as evidence for the military use of dogs in the medieval period tends to be very questionable. Both Sébastien Polin and Andrea Steinfel, for example, take an imaginative illustration from a fourteenth century Byzantine military tract, of a dog in the unlikely act of carrying a pot of 'Greek fire' on its back as an anti-cavalry weapon,

[9]Yuval Noah Harari, 'Strategy and Supply in Fourteenth-Century Western European Invasion Campaigns', *The Journal of Military History*, 64 (2000), p. 302.

[10]Robert I. Burns, 'Document: Dogs of War in Thirteenth-Century Valencian Garrisons', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, IV, (2006), p. 167.

[11]Burns, 'Dogs of War in Thirteenth-Century Valencian Garrisons', p. 164. Hugo O. Bizzarri has also drawn attention to a Castilian late medieval tradition of depicting dogs as 'warriors', especially those engaged in ancestral war against wolves; "Hunde im Krieg: ein Bild der Macht im mittelalterlichen Kastilien", in Mechthild Albert, Ulrike Becker, Elke Brügge and Karina Kellermann (eds) *Textualität von Macht und Herrschaft*, (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2020), pp. 129-150.

entirely at face value.[12] By the later fifteenth century, and on into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the proliferation of both printed literature and administrative documentation gives us yet greater, and more reliable, evidence. This includes some suggestions of long-standing, but probably localised, traditions of employing dogs in military and quasi-military contexts, especially in the familiar roles of sentry.

In Brittany's ports the practice of guarding naval facilities with large, aggressive dogs, 'worked loose' in the streets during the hours of darkness, was attested by numerous sources. A Bohemian nobleman, Leo of Rozmital, travelling across Europe on a diplomatic mission between 1465 and 1467, recorded that in St Malo, 'They breed great dogs which at night run about the streets in place of watchmen. When they are loosed from their chains no one can walk through the town, for the dogs would immediately tear him to pieces.'[13] In 1620, James Howell, clerk to the Privy Council of Charles I, visited the town and wrote to his cousin of its fearsome sentinels, 'which are let out at night to guard the ships and eat carrion up and down the streets…' The animals he saw, however, had not been bred locally but were imported: '[St Malo] hath a rarity to it, for there is a large garrison of English, but they are English *dogs*…' [emphasis in original].[14] Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) thought this garrison worthy of mention in his diary too. In 1665 Pepys recorded that their precise purpose was 'to secure the anchors, cables and ships that lie dry which might otherwise in the night be liable to be robbed.' He also recorded how dutifully the dogs responded to the sound of a horn in the morning, that recalled them to their kennel, which suggests that they were, to some degree, trained.[15]

Certainly, by the sixteenth century there is some literary evidence for the systematic training of dogs for guard duties and personal protection. This training echoes modern practice. The pioneering Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) wrote of 'dogs that defend mankind in the course of private, and also public, conflicts...' who would 'be an enemy to everybody but his master; so much so that he will not allow himself to be stroked even by those who know him best.' Besides giving a strong

[12]Polin *Le chien de guerre utilisations à travers les conflits*, p. 19. Andrea Steinfeldt, *Kampfhunde: Geschichte, Einsatz, Haltungs probleme von "Bull-Rassen"– Eine Literaturstudie* (PhD Thesis: Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover, 2002), [https://elib.tiho-hannover.de/dissertations/steinfeldta_2002 Accessed 5 September 2020, p. 26.

[13]*The Travels of Leo of Rozmital*, translated by Malcolm Letts, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 64.

[14]James Howell, *Familiar Letters on Important Subjects,* (Aberdeen: Douglas and Murray, 1753), p. 34.

[15]*The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, edited by Charles Wheatley, Vol.V, (London: George Bell, 1904), pp. 298-299.

indication of the necessarily very close personal ties of loyalty and affection that such dogs developed with individual humans, Aldrovandi's evidence describes how they were prepared to perform their duties:

> This dog ought to be trained up to fight from the earliest years. Accordingly some man or other is fitted out with a coat of thick skin, which the dogs will not be able to bite through, as a sort of dummy; the dog is then spurred upon this man, upon which the man in skins runs away and then allows himself to be caught and, falling on the ground in front of the dog to be bitten.[16]

However, it is unlikely such dogs were widely used in a military context within Europe. Such dogs are dangerous to friend and foe, especially when worked loose as appears to have been the Breton practice. Experience with modern guard dogs has demonstrated that when they are worked off the leash, they may well bring down any unwary friendly personnel who wander into their territory. A British Army memorandum of 1943 noted '[working loose] is discouraged at the majority of V.P.s [vulnerable points] in case a loose dog should attack any authorised person who may be moving about the area by night.'[17] Indeed, if more than one animal was being used, there was every chance they would attack each other, unless they were well acquainted: 'Combat dogs [the term used by the post-war British Army for the large, highly aggressive dogs employed on guard duty] are often worked in couples and, to avoid fighting among themselves when attacking a man, should be kennelled together.'[18] This danger appears to have ended the Breton tradition. According to David Karunanithy this practice of letting them run loose continued until 1770, when one killed a young French naval officer.[19]

Besides the inherent risk in the practice, the fact that visitors to the region were so struck by it, and thus recorded it in their diaries and letters, suggests that the particular reliance placed by the Bretons upon their watch dogs was exceptional enough to attract note. Yet similar localised traditions may be identified elsewhere. A few brief and otherwise unverified, references indicate that English armies may have made some use of war dogs on campaign during the sixteenth century. According to Olaus Magnus (1490-1557), historian and archbishop of Uppsala, Henry VIII sent military auxiliaries accompanied by 400 dogs to the Emperor Charles V, possibly in 1544, 'to provide a guard for the army.' There is also the suggestion, by one of Robert Cecil's spies, that the Earl of Essex included mastiffs in the English force he led to Ireland in 1598. If the

[16]Michael G. Lemish, *War Dogs: Canines in Combat,* (London: Brasseys, 1996), p. 3
[17]The UK National Archive (hereinafter TNA) WO 199 2537, Report on Visit to 7 V.P.s in Eastern Command, 3 November 1943.
[18]War Office, *Training of War Dogs* (1952), p. 41.
[19]Karunanithy, *Dogs of War*, p. 23.

spy was correct about these dogs, they may have part of a Tudor tradition of employing guard dogs on campaign.[20] The Breton example itself was explicitly cited in another well-documented British use of guard dogs. During their brief and contested occupation of Tangier, 1662-84, the British employed watch dogs in defence of their fortifications. Lancelot Addison, the garrison's chaplain, described how in 1663 the colony's governor, the Earl of Teviot, 'placed a (St. Malo's) Guard of Dogs' in his outermost works, who reliably gave advanced warning on the approach of Moorish forces.[21]

Sleuth Hounds: Dogs in Border Warfare and Campaigns of Conquest

While the role of guard dog took advantage of the canine's natural territoriality and capacity to give warning by barking, their ability to track quarry was also militarised in the specific context of border warfare and the aftermath of campaigns of conquest. These campaigns were conducted in conditions analogous to modern counter-insurgency operations, in which 'trackers' and 'patrol dogs' have proved their worth again and again. Post-Second World War British tests and experience in the field during counter-insurgency conflicts such as the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (1952-60), demonstrated the potency of dogs in these roles. Even in jungle conditions, trackers picked up trails up to 36 hours old. During the Korean War, it was found that 'in flat country and with the wind in his favour the [patrol] dog will alert [warn of] an enemy up to 400 yards away.'[22]

For the medieval period, Anglo-Scottish conflict provides some of the richest and most reliable evidence. Two sources in which we can have much confidence, *The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel* (c.1360) and John Barbour's poem *The Actes and Life of the most Victorious Conqueror Robert Bruce King of Scotland* (1376), maintain that the English King Edward I employed 'sluth hund' [sleuth hounds] in Scotland, to pursue the fugitive King Robert and his followers through 'wilds and forests haunted by the Scots', during the campaigns of 1306-1307. Barbour, while an author of chivalric poetry rather than

[20]Quoted in Karunanithy, p. 109. Letter, April 29, 1598, Giles Van Harwick [alias of William Resould] to Peter Artson [alias of Robert Cecil], *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1598-1601*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green, (London, 1869), p. 43.
[21]Lancelot Addison, *The Moores Baffled: Being a Discourse Concerning Tanger*, (London: William Crooke, 1681), pp. 15-16.
[22]TNA WO 291/1475, 'Investigation of range of detection of human quarries by patrol dogs', (1953); TNA WO 291/1571, Investigation into ability of tracking dogs to follow a human quarry, (1951*);* Imperial War Museum (hereinafter IWM) 11300, Private Papers of General Sir Michael West GCB DSO, 'Order on Use and Usefulness of Patrol Dogs', (Korea Records, 1952-53); Director of Operations (Malaya), The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (1958), Chapter XXI, Section 4: p. 8, p. 4.

history, was a near contemporary, well-informed and appears to have drawn on first-hand accounts of the events he described. Similarly, the Flemish clerk Jean le Bel drew for his chronicles on his own direct experiences, interviews with eyewitnesses and other reliable testimony. In the case of the use of dogs used to pursue King Robert, his evidence was 'a history commissioned by King Robert himself.'[23] Barbour also offers the compelling detail that the sleuth hounds were recruited locally with their handlers, two hundred men of Galloway.[24] Again, the assertion has the ring of truth to it, for dogs perform most effectively when working singularly or in small groups in close co-operation with humans with whom they have an established affective bond.[25] It seems most likely that these were 'dogs in war', hunting dogs, redeployed on an *ad hoc* basis to pursue Edward's scattered enemies. When circumstances in the Anglo-Scots Marches demanded, such 'sleuth hounds' were again pressed into military service. In the sixteenth century, conditions along that border veered between open warfare between the nations (in 1513, 1523, 1542, 1544-51, 1557-59) and a more persistent, low-intensity conflict of foray, 'hot-trod' pursuit and livestock rustling (between the clannish marcher 'riding families') during the years of 'peace.'[26] It was in the latter circumstances, so characteristic of frontier warfare generally, that dogs proved particularly useful, chiefly as guards and trackers. In August 1596, during a spike in raiding, the Bishop of Durham wrote to the Earl of Huntingdon, 'To order the justices strictly to revive the good orders for watches of all kinds, slough houndes, following hue and cry, and putting themselves and servants in better order for service under their tenures and leases, in these remote partes.'[27] The English chronicler Raphael Holinshed (c.1520-80), drawing on the authority of the Scottish scholar Hector Boece (c.1465-c.1536), described these dogs as 'verie exquisite in following the foot … upon the borders of England and Scotland where pillage is good purchase

[23]*The True Chronicles of Jean Le Bel,* translated by Nigel Bryant, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), p. 62.

[24]*John Barbour's The Bruce*, Book 6, Lines 30-40, translated by James Higgins, (Bury St Edmunds: Abramis, 2013), pp. 113-114.

[25]For the importance of such affective bonds, see Robert G. W. Kirk, '"In Dogs We Trust?" Intersubjectivity, Response-able Relations and the Making of Mine Detector Dogs,' *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 50 (2014), pp. 1-36; E. H. Richardson, *British War Dogs* (London: Skeffington, 1920), p. 65 and TNA WO 204/7732, Instructions on Use and Training of Dog Police, Corps of Military Police, 20 February 1944.

[26]For an excellent guide, see George Macdonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The Story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers,* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971).

[27]Letter, Bishop of Durham to Earl of Huntingdon, August 1595, in *Calendar of Border Papers*: Volume 2, 1595-1603, ed. Joseph Bain, (London, 1896), pp. 43- 53. British History Online https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-border-papers/vol2/pp43-53 . Accessed 5 July 2018.

indifferentlie on both sides.'[28] By the late eighteenth century the animal that had been 'distinguished by the name of Sleuth Hound' was more usually referred to as the blood-hound: 'taller than the old English hound, most beautifully formed and superior to every other kind in activity, speed and sagacity.'[29]

The *montería infernal*: Dogs and Colonisation

As noted, the use of sleuth hounds along the Anglo-Scottish border is redolent of twentieth-century deployment of patrol and, especially, tracker dogs (British Army tracker dogs in Kenya in the 1950s, for example, were similarly used to pursue cattle thieves).[30] Before, however, too many parallels are drawn between pre-modern antecedents and modern practice, it is important to draw some distinctions. The use of dogs bred for the hunt for military or quasi-military functions was still *ad hoc* even if part of a recurrent tradition. Even as professional, standing military forces were developing in Europe, there were no regular, trained dog units. Furthermore, in the context of Europe's early wars of colonisation against enemies dismissed as heathens, savages or rebels, there developed a horrifying practice of 'weaponizing' aggressive dogs. Against a background of hardening notions of racial difference, these were deliberately set upon enemies considered outside the bounds of the established customs of war that limited violence, for example against prisoners or non-combatants.[31] This practice was then sustained as an instrument in the policing of the enslaved and in military campaigns against maroon colonies and servile insurrections. This would lead to a continuous tradition of deployment of specialist dog and handler teams in a military context. As Sarah E. Johnson notes 'the axis of Spanish, French, British, and North American slave-holding powers in the region collaborated in

[28]Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Vol. 5, (London: J. Johnson, 1807-08), p. 12.

[29]Account of the Blood Hounds, *The Town and Country Magazine*, 25 (October 1793): p. 454

[30]TNA WO 276/89, General HQ East Africa, Dogs.

[31]For the lack of customary restraints in early American warfare, see Thomas S. Abler, 'Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism and Rape: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Conflicting Cultural Values in War', *Anthropologica*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1992): pp. 3-20; John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adam J. Hirsch, 'The Collision of Military Cultures in Seventeenth-Century New England', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (1988), pp. 1187-1212; Ronald Dale Karr, '"Why Should You Be So Furious?": The Violence of the Pequot War', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (1998), pp. 876-909; Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

subduing non-white enemy combatants, using canine warfare techniques that dated back to the Spanish conquest of the Americas.'[32]

Indeed, these practices date back to the very earliest phases of European colonisation, pre-dating Columbus's landing in the Americas. Jean de Bethancourt, who conquered the Canary Isles for Castile in 1402, is alleged to have unleashed hunting dogs against the indigenous people, the Guanches. Although armed in only a rudimentary fashion, the Guanches were skilful in laying ambushes and evading pursuit, for they were 'swift of foot and run like hares.' Hunting dogs could detect their presence before they unleashed their surprise attacks and could track them as they fled. Combat thus took on the qualities of the chase and Bethancourt's soldiers 'took dogs with them as if they were going sporting down the island.'[33] The peculiar horror associated with this campaign, though, is the development of the *montería infernal* (infernal chase), in which hunting dogs did not merely track their victims but were deliberately set upon them. This abhorrent practise apparently became a feature of the pacification of the Canaries over the course of the next hundred years. And it would travel to the New World in the ships of the *conquistadors*.

The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566), an outraged critic of the cruelties his compatriots inflicted upon Native Americans, penned vivid descriptions of the use of dogs as instruments of warfare, torture and execution, that still have the power to horrify: 'As has been said the Spanish train their fierce dogs to attack, kill and tear to pieces the Indians … [they] keep alive their dogs' appetite for human flesh in this way. They have Indians brought to them in chains and unleash the dogs. The Indians come meekly down the road and are killed ...'[34] Some caution about the extent of this practice is needed here. Bartolomé de Las Casas was a politically motivated polemicist, whose denunciations of the violence against indigenous peoples committed by his compatriots extended sometimes to fabrication and exaggeration. He, and other priests who wrote similar accounts, were caught up in a contest with soldiers and settlers over the exercise of power in the new colonies and the tension between exploiting Native American labour and recognising their humanity and prospects for salvation. Making allegations of appalling and, under Spanish law criminal, acts furthered

[32]Sara E. Johnson, '"You Should Give them Blacks to Eat"', p. 67.
[33]Pierre Bontier and Jean Le Verrier, *The Canarian or the Conquest and Conversion of the Canary Islands by Messire Jean de Bethancouurt*, edited and translated by Richard Henry Major, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1872), pp. 149-150.
[34]Bartolomé de Las Casa, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, translated by Herma Briffault, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 127.

their cause before the Spanish crown. However, many of the specific instances they describe appear to have been apocryphal.[35]

Furthermore, these accounts then became a fertile source of atrocity stories for Spain's enemies, chiefly North European Protestants, who perpetuated the 'Black Legend' of peculiar Spanish cruelty and fanaticism. This legend has cast its shadow even over the modern Anglophone historiography. The fullest account of the place of war dogs in the Spanish colonisation of the New World, is that by John Grier Varner and Jeanette Johnson Varner.[36] This is an exhaustively researched work but fails to consider the reliability of the primary sources.[37] Verifying the common assumption that dogs were routinely and deliberately set upon humans during the Spanish campaigns of conquest is thus difficult. Familiar with the conventional wisdom on the subject, archaeologists who examined the skeletal remains of people of the chiefdom of Coosa, apparently massacred by Spanish soldiers during Hernando de Soto's 1540 incursion into what is now Georgia, were 'puzzled by the fact that we found no injuries inflicted by the huge war dogs brought on the expedition.'[38]

However, we cannot discount the sheer volume of evidence we have for the weaponizing of dogs during the colonisation of the New World. It is likely that the significant numbers of dogs that accompanied the Spanish were deployed primarily in their established roles as trackers, guards, and, when supplies ran short, as rations, along with the horses.[39] However, it is also very probable that, in the same manner as modern military police dogs, working closely with handlers, some were indeed trained to pursue and bring down enemies, combatants or non-combatants, allowing them to be captured or killed. Again, drawing on the modern experience of military working dogs, both the effectiveness and the potential for injury to the victim of this weaponised canine is easily attested. As the instructions to British dog handlers during Second World War made clear '*The Police Dog is the Policeman's weapon*, and if not correctly handled he can be a very *dangerous* one.' [emphasis in the original]. During that conflict, British military police handlers were very restricted in the circumstances in which they were permitted to release their dogs and if they did so were

[35]Douglas T. Peck, 'Revival of the Spanish "Black Legend": The American Repudiation of Their Spanish Heritage', *Revista de Historia de América*, No. 128 (2001), pp. 27-28.
[36]John Grier Varner and Jeanette Johnson Varner, *Dogs of the Conquest,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).
[37]Amy Turner Bushnell, '*Dogs of the Conquest* by John Grier Varner and Jeanette Johnson Varner', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (1984), pp. 99-101
[38]Robert L. Blakely and David S. Mathews, 'Bioarchaeological Evidence for a Spanish-Native American Conflict in the Sixteenth-Century Southeast', *American Antiquity*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (1990), p. 739.
[39]Varner and Varner, *Dogs of the Conquest*, p. 122.

subsequently required to justify their decision. Nor were these dogs trained to maul those they pursued; they brought them down and held them until their handlers arrived on the scene.[40] In earlier colonial warfare, its conduct inflected by the perception of indigenous and enslaved peoples as heathen 'savages', barely removed from the animal kingdom, no such restrictions or sense of accountability would have operated.

Dogs and Colonial Warfare in North America

Dogs also served both the French and English in North America in a number of military capacities from the earliest days of their incursions onto the continent. In 1603, the English sailor Martin Pring landed on the shores of what, almost two decades later, would become the Plymouth colony. His landing parties were escorted by 'two excellent Mastives', natives of Bristol named Foole and Gallant, 'of whom the Indians were more afraid, than twentie of [my] men.' The English mastiff was a large, formidable dog, bred for fighting, and for baiting bulls and bears and they looked the part; Foole and Gallant thus proved effective primarily as deterrents. When they were loosed, 'suddenly without cryes the Savages would flee away.'[41] When, within a few years, the English planted colonies in Virginia and New England, the use of both sentry and tracker dogs would become a recurrent feature of the conflicts they provoked with Native Americans. Conveniently forgetting their country's previous outrage at the Spanish use of dogs in hunting humans, the settlers of Jamestown, Virginia, established in 1607, were soon following their example. In 1622, following a devastating surprise attack by warriors of the Powhatan confederacy, Edward Waterhouse, the secretary of the Virginia Company of London, denounced them as 'that perfidious and inhumane people' and as 'naked, tanned, deformed Savages.' The English, he bitterly seethed, should now emulate the Spanish, 'by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastives to seaze them.'[42]

To be sure, dogs served in other capacities during colonial conflicts. In late 1665, for example, a 600-strong French punitive force moved against the Mohawks, striking, as they did so, into territories claimed by the English near Fort Albany. They coped with the harsh winter conditions by adopting Native American military practices, wearing snowshoes and making use of dogs as draught animals: 'their provisions being laid in

[40]TNA WO 204/7732, Instructions on Use and Training of Dog Police.
[41]Mark A. Mastromar, 'Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks: The English Mastiff and the Anglo-American Experience', *The Historian*, Vol.49, No.1 (1986), p. 18.
[42]Michael Guasco, 'To "Doe Some Good upon Their Countrymen": The Paradox of Indian Slavery in Early Anglo-America', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2007): p. 396.

slight sledges drawn by mastiff dogs.'[43] Yet it would be the blood-hound and the mastiff as sentries, trackers, and sometimes as weapons, that would epitomise the war dog in the North American conflicts. Thus in 1675, during the New England colonists' war against Metacom ('King Philip') of the Wampanoag, one English official, bemoaning the 'skulking' tactics of his enemies, observed that 'great guns and dogs will do the best service, both which being a terror to them.'[44]

Similarly, when Britain's entry into the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) ignited renewed conflict with Abenakis allied to France, dogs were mobilised again for frontier warfare. The scouting parties that ranged from Fort Dummer, in what is today Vermont, down to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, were accompanied by tracking dogs who swiftly picked up the trails of raiders moving through the wilderness. After re-occupying the abandoned settlement at Charleston, on the Connecticut River, in March 1746, the garrison was alerted to a body of French and Abenaki troops creeping forward against them by the barking of their dogs. That July, a foraging party from that same garrison were looking for horses outside their post, when their dogs again scented danger and barked their alarm. An enemy war band was hidden nearby but, thanks to the early warning, was successfully driven off.[45]

Notwithstanding the peculiar cruelties born of racialised conflict, the use of dogs in frontier warfare in North America fitted largely into the established historical pattern. It appears to have relied upon essentially untrained 'dogs in war', deployed on a relatively small-scale, in an *ad hoc* and essentially recurrent, rather than continuous or systematic, practice. On the outbreak of the French and Indian War, 1754-63, some individuals again advocated the use of dogs. In 1755, for example, Benjamin Franklin urged his fellow colonists to set vicious dogs upon Native Americans, and referred to this as 'the Spanish method.'[46] A British officer, Colonel Henry Bouquet, took

[43]'America and West Indies: December 1665', in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies:* Volume 5, 1661-1668, ed. W Noel Sainsbury, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), pp. 338-351. British History Online http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp338-351. Accessed 10 June 2018.

[44]Letter, Benjamin Batten to Sir Thomas Allin, Boston, June 1675, in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*: Volume 9, pp. 1675-1676 and Addenda pp. 1574-1674, ed. W Noel Sainsbury, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893), pp. 238-253. British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol9/pp238-253 . Accessed 10 June 2018.

[45]E. Hoyt, *Antiquarian Researches; comprising a history of the Indian wars in the Country bordering Connecticut river and parts adjacent, etc.,* (Greenfield, Mass.: 1824), p. 232, p. 236 & p. 242.

[46]Mastromar, 'Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks', p. 22.

Franklin's suggestion seriously and arranged to 'have Fifty Couples of proper Hounds imported from Great Britain with People who understand [how] to train and manage them.'[47] Bouquet envisaged that these were to serve alongside light cavalry, where they 'would be useful to find out the enemies ambushes; and to follow their tracks; they would seize the naked savages, or at least give time to the horsemen to come up with them; they would add to the safety of the camp at night by discovering any attempt to surprise it.'[48]

In the event, after Britain's victory over the French and their native allies in North America, only sporadic further use seems to have been made of dogs for military purposes on the frontier. For professional soldiers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the dog had little place in warfare waged between trained, regular soldiers. In 1779, Roger Stevenson, a British lieutenant, published a treatise for officers leading small detachments in the field. He acknowledged that 'the ancients employed dogs to discover the enemy in ambuscade' but warned that 'it will be well to distrust such spies and suffer none with the corps', for their barking 'will furnish the enemy with a hundred opportunities of observing you before you can know where they are.'[49] An oral tradition in Ireland suggested that the British Army had employed bloodhounds locally, in the pursuit of United Irishmen during the rising of 1798, in the familiar context of counter insurgency.[50] Similarly a local, and unsuccessful, experiment was made employing six blood hounds, purchased from Tennessee by a Minnesota militia regiment, against the Dakota in 1865.[51]

The Modern Legacy: Dogs and Racialised Warfare

The bloodhound continued to perform an important quasi-military function in the Americas into the mid-nineteenth century: policing the communities of enslaved Africans and their descendants upon whose labour colonial plantation economies depended. Resistance to enslavement, a phenomenon that encompassed a range of activities from large-scale organised rebellions through to spontaneous acts of individual defiance and flight, was a characteristic of American slavery from its earliest establishment. One of the greatest challenges to slave-holding regimes came when communities of fugitives, generally referred to as maroons, were able to establish

[47]Mastromar, 'Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks', pp. 23-24.

[48]William Smith, *An Historic Account of the Expedition Against the Ohio Indians,* (London: T. Jeffries, 1766), p. 50.

[49] Roger Stevenson, Military Instructions for Officers Dispatched in the Field (London: 1779), p. 66.

[50]Mrs. O'Toole, as told to Pádraig Ó Tuathail, 'Wicklow in the Rising of 1798', *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. 40 (1987), p. 150.

[51]Theodore E. Potter, 'Captain Potter's Recollections of Minnesota Experiences', *Minnesota History Bulletin*, Vol. 1 (1916), pp. 419-521 & p. 506.

sanctuaries in isolated or difficult country, such as the mountainous regions of central Jamaica. There, they could maintain their own autonomy, through armed resistance if necessary, and forge alliances with indigenous peoples, rebels, pirates, and other outcasts of empire.[52] The environmental and demographic circumstances in which colonial regimes waged war against the rebellious and the fugitive slave, gave rise to the familiar characteristics of frontier and counter-insurgent warfare. Tracker dogs made for useful auxiliaries during raids, ambushes, pursuits and scattered, running fights in difficult terrain.

In February 1686, the Council of the English colony of Jamaica met to 'advise as to the means of suppressing the rebel negroes who are now more formidable than ever before.' It was decided that 'twelve parties be forthwith raised out of the several regiments [garrisoning the island], each of eighteen men with suitable officers' and sent in pursuit of the rebels. They were to be assisted in this task by locally-sourced dogs and motivated by the offer of bounties: 'every party [should] have a good gang of dogs and be empowered to impress hunters and dogs. Every man killing a negro to have £20, or, if a servant, his freedom; every man taking a negro to have £40; and party killing a negro to divide £20 round.'[53] However, this was, once more, a localised and temporary mobilisation of trackers and their handlers, an improvisation that fitted well into the familiar patterns of military dog use.

The Spanish case in Cuba was different because they established a permanent force of dogs and handlers, which, through the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century, served against those who challenged slavery, the *Chasseurs del Rey*. An account in a British journal of 1803 recorded 'these people live with their dogs from which they are inseparable.' Yet their upbringings were harsh; '[the hound's] coat, or skin, is much harder than that of most dogs, and so must be the whole structure of the body, as the severe beatings he undergoes in training would kill any other species of dog.' Each *chasseur* maintained three dogs at their own expense, taking two into the field when called upon to 'hunt'. The author notes that, ideally, these hounds were 'perfectly broken, that is to say they will not kill the object they pursue unless resisted…' Yet the author adds that among some *chasseurs* such well-trained hounds, although the

[52]See, Herbert Aptheker, 'Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States', *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1939), pp. 167-184; Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal,* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1988).

[53]Minutes of Council of Jamaica, February 2, 1686, in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 12 1685-1688 and Addenda 1653-1687*, ed. J W Fortescue, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1899), pp. 147-157. British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol12/pp147-157. Accessed 10 June 2018.

ones usually used on 'hunts', were also the minority. The *chasseurs* of Bejucal, for example, had but seventy 'properly broke' hounds. The others, 'of which they had many … will kill the object they pursue: they fly at the throat or other part of a man and never quit till they are cut in two.'[54]

These *Chasseurs del Rey* provided both dogs and handlers to other colonial regimes as they fought to preserve white racial hegemony. In 1802, Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, Vicomte de Rochambeau, was dispatched to take command of the French forces attempting to suppress the servile insurrection in Saint Domingue (Haiti). He was a veteran of revolutionary warfare, having served as an *aide de camp* to his father the Comte de Rochambeau, architect of the decisive Franco-American victory over the British at Yorktown in 1781. Yet in Saint Domingue he proved no friend to liberty or rebellion, for there he fought a race war. One of his first acts was to purchase twenty-eight dogs from Cuba, which would play a central role in his strategy of pacification through savagery. The nature of these dogs' duties, as weapons and instruments of torture and intimidation, was quickly made apparent. Rochambeau instructed an *aide de camp*: 'I send you my dear commandant... 28 "bouledogues." These reinforcements will allow you to entirely finish your operations. I don't need to tell you that no rations or expenditures are authorized for the nourishment of the dogs; you should give them blacks to eat.' Upon their arrival, the ferocity of the dogs had been demonstrated to a crowd in the most appalling fashion, by setting them upon the enslaved servant of a French general, bound on a platform erected for the display. The dogs 'devoured his entrails and didn't abandon their prey until they had gorged themselves on the palpitating flesh. Nothing was left on the post but bloody bones.'[55]

The French were not the only purchasers of such dogs for employment against those who resisted enslavement. British Captain Marcus Rainsford noted the success of Cuban bloodhounds serving with British forces in Jamaica, in 1795-96. He claimed that, unlike the French and Spanish, the British had employed the dogs only to track and to terrify maroons, and had never deliberately set them on men, women or children. Yet he was fully aware that the dogs had been bred for that very purpose and described how their ferocity was instilled in some detail.[56]

Bloodhounds were also an important tool in upholding slavery on the North American continent, serving both the slave patrols that policed the institution on a day-to-day basis, and the slave hunters who pursued runaways. The animals were, in practice,

[54]'Description of the Spanish Chasseurs and Blood Hounds', *The Edinburgh Magazine* August 1803, pp. 94-97.
[55]Johnson, '"You Should Give them Blacks to Eat"', pp. 67-68.
[56]Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti,* (London: Albion Press, 1805), p. 90, p. 327, & pp. 426-427.

weapons as well as trackers. Although the practice was technically forbidden by law in many Southern states, they were sometimes deliberately set on runaways, without legal consequences. Louisiana planter David Barrow recorded the torture he inflicted upon one re-captured fugitive from his plantation: 'dogs soon tore him naked, took him home before the negro[es] at dark & made the dogs give him another overhauling.'[57] The example of purchasing Cuban bloodhounds was followed by the United States government itself. In the course of the conflict the US fought against maroons and their Seminole allies in Florida, the Second Seminole War (1835-42), thirty-three dogs and their handlers were imported from Cuba. Like Marcus Rainsford, both General Zachary Taylor, the commander in Florida, and Joel R. Poinsett, Secretary of State for War, insisted that these hounds only served 'to track and discover Indians, not to worry or destroy them.' However, this 'atrocious and barbarous policy' was widely denounced by abolitionists such as Joshua Giddens who, with considerable justification, regarded the nation's successive wars against the peoples of Florida as little more than federal 'slave catching expeditions'.[58] As it turned out, the hounds performed poorly in Florida, where the swampy Everglades offered a poor environment for tracking by scent.[59]

However, the continued use of bloodhounds to police American slavery ensured the dog a bit-part, but well remembered, in the drama of the Civil War, 1861-65. Their principal deployment was as guards at prisoner of war camps, and as trackers in the event of an escape. Although their use in these roles was not confined to the Confederate camp at Andersonville in Georgia, it was there that the practice acquired its notoriety. The trial of the camp's commander, Henry Wirz, for war crimes in September 1865, received much testimony on the subject: 'Henry Wirz, did conspire with Wesley Turner, Benjamin Harris (Hound Keepers) and other citizens and did keep and use ferocious and blood-thirsty dogs, dangerous to human life, to hunt down prisoners of war and did incite and encourage the dogs to seize, tear, mangle, and maim the bodies and limbs of the fugitive prisoners of war.'[60] Wirz was subsequently executed. The episode is a stark reminder of the racialised nature of canine warfare in the Americas. Wirz's crime had not been setting dogs on people, a practice that had been long tolerated within slavery, but setting dogs on *white* people.[61] Less

[57]John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation,* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp. 161-162.
[58]Joshua R. Giddens, *The Exiles of Florida,* (Columbus, Ohio: Follet and Foster, 1858), p. 39, p. 264 & p. 268.
[59]James W. Covington, 'Cuban Bloodhounds and the Seminoles', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 33, (1954), pp. 111-119.
[60]Larry H. Spruill, 'Slave Patrols, "Packs of Negro Dogs" and Policing Black Communities', *Phylon* Vol. 53, (2016), p. 57.
[61]Ibid., p. 58.

infamous than the guard dogs patrolling POW camps, but equally striking in terms of the blurring of the established racial mores of canine warfare in the Americas, was the Confederate military's use of bloodhounds for internal policing duties. For instance, James M. Dancy, a Confederate artilleryman stationed near Chattahoochee in Florida in early 1865, recalled that 'the most disagreeable service [he] was called upon to render' was 'hunting deserters' with bloodhounds (and they would be deployed again to track armed draft resistors in Arkansas in 1918).[62]

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), regular military dog units, the lineal antecedents of today's military working dogs, were established by most continental European armies. Whether serving as sentries and patrol dogs, and in locating the wounded, on widely extended battlefields or working as draft animals to supply ammunition to units armed with rapid firing weapons, their use was a response to the changing conditions of modern 'machine-age' warfare. That modernity was evident too, in the professionalisation of dog handling units composed of regular soldiers and carefully selected and trained dogs. The sophistication of modern training methods and behaviour modification also overcame many of the older objections to employing dogs. In 1893, a British journalist who had witnessed trials of patrol and guard dogs with a number of continental armies noted that they did their duty without barking and could distinguish friend from foe at range: 'They can be trained to announce the approach of a known friend in a quite different way, viz., by leaping to and fro or crouching down and jumping up by turns, but without the warning growl of the danger approach.'[63]

These highly trained, regular teams of dogs and handlers were thus an innovation, distinct from the largely sporadic, localised and *ad hoc* traditions of deploying dogs as sentinels and trackers that characterised pre-modern warfare. Yet, in some ways, it is not so easy to draw clear distinctions between the older and the newer practices. Chronologically, they overlap. As late as the Second South African War (1899-1902), British soldiers were still using untrained, locally adopted strays as extemporised guard and 'scout' dogs.[64] More strikingly, in one respect the modern and the traditional showed a disturbing convergence. In the Americas, a continuous tradition of canine warfare had developed in the service of maintaining white racial hegemony. And the

[62]James M. Dancy, 'Reminiscences of the Civil War', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 37 (1958), p. 80. See also Arnold Shankman, 'Draft Resistance in Civil War Pennsylvania', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 101, (1977), p. 200. For the events of 1918, see James F. Willis, 'The Cleburne County Draft War', *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, (1967), p. 27.

[63]'The Dogs of War', *Manchester Times*, November 24, 1893, p. 5.

[64]Richardson, *War, Police and Watch Dogs,* (London: Blackwood, 1910), pp. 105-106.

earliest deployments of regular dog units would occur in colonial warfare, such as by the French in Madagascar in 1895.[65] Yet more infamously, and also in the context of racialised warfare, dogs would again be used as instruments of torture and execution in Nazi concentration camps.[66] All who seek to write the history of war dogs need to reckon with this dark legacy.

[65]'Interesting Facts', *The Manchester Times*, May 10, 1893, p. 5.
[66]Tindol, 'The Best Friend of the Murderers' pp. 107-109.